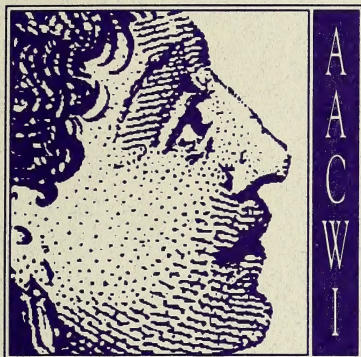


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ALBERTA
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ON
WOMEN'S
ISSUES

**Breadmakers and Breadwinners ...
The Voices of Alberta Women**

February, 1996



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Breadmakers and Breadwinners ... The Voices of Alberta Women

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A report summarizing the results of a public consultation process with Alberta women prepared by the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues.

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Message from the Chairperson

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues (AACWI) was formed in 1986 to work toward the full and equal participation of women in the life of the province. As we look to the sunset of the Council, it is important that this work continue.

In the spring of 1995 the Council initiated a public consultation process to see what women thought were the most effective ways for them to influence government and public policy. More than 400 women shared their vision of how they would like to relate to government. Thank you to all who participated. Your input was valuable, at times passionate and often thought-provoking.

It is now time for government and women to meet directly and develop a shared vision for the future. With the closure of the AACWI, it is absolutely imperative that government be able to communicate its vision of inclusiveness and how it will work toward ensuring the full participation of women. Only then can we address the many issues we still face, including poverty among women, violence against women and women's lack of representation at the economic and political decision-making tables.

It is important to remember that women have not one voice, but many. The richness of women's contributions comes from diversity, a diversity that was evident throughout the public consultation process. We must not let government become discouraged from seeking out women's concerns and perspectives because of evident polarities. Women are not a special interest group and must never be expected to speak from one position.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the many women who have served on the Council since 1986. Your spirit, wisdom and creativity has contributed to government policy, to the awareness of women's issues and to recognition of the contributions women have made to the economic and political life of Alberta.

Without a demonstrable commitment from government for inclusion and participation of women, the loss of the Council will be a major step backward for the women of Alberta. The challenge belongs to all of us if we are to ensure success.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn P. Fleger

Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. (Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, October 17, 1995, Page 82)

Executive Summary

In the spring of 1995, at the direction of the Honourable Gary Mar, the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues (AACWI) initiated a public consultation process with the women of Alberta. The timing of the consultation was important due to the provincial government's stated intent to terminate the Council in December 1996, using the sunset clause contained in AACWI's founding legislation.

Participants in the public consultation were drawn from a wide range of ages, cultural backgrounds, economic status, educational levels, rural and urban areas. The process involved over 400 women from 24 communities across the province. The intent of the process was to ask women how they have, in the past, communicated their concerns to the Government of Alberta, how effective these strategies were, and what methods and structures could be used in the future. Women were also asked to identify the issues they thought were important to the women of Alberta.

This report summarizes the results of the public consultation and makes recommendations for a strong partnership among the women of Alberta, women's organizations and government. The following are highlights from the report.

- ☐ Women described strategies and their effectiveness used to communicate issues and concerns to the Government of Alberta.
- ☐ Women described six general areas that were perceived as barriers for having impact and effecting change. These were:
 - limited knowledge of women's issues by some women, by the public and by the government
 - knowing how to make their viewpoint known to decision-makers and politicians
 - the required time commitment given other family and community responsibilities

- the limited financial resources available to undertake change-oriented activities
 - the fear of consequences or retribution for speaking out
 - a perception that government does not listen, particularly to women
- ☐ Women identified eight major issues that impact on women and that need to be addressed (in order from most to least often mentioned):
- Health Care
 - Financial Issues
 - Employment, Employers and the Workplace
 - Education
 - Child Care
 - Abuse and Violence Against Women and Children
 - Legal Issues
 - Women as Leaders in Business and Politics
- ☐ Women described a wide range of functions, roles and activities which are important if women and government are to engage in a successful *partnership* that is focused on resolving issues in the future.
- ☐ Women also described several criteria that could/should be used when restructuring mechanisms for women and government to work toward resolution of issues.
- ☐ Based on participant input, five options were identified for the structures and methods necessary to continue work on issues:
- Create a new council or commission to work on women's issues
 - Create a provincial coalition of existing women's organizations
 - Extend AACWI's mandate and make changes to its structure and processes
 - Create an Alberta women's consortium
 - Close AACWI as of December 1996, with no replacement structure

The formal recommendations from the Advisory Council begin on page 31 of this report.

I. Introduction

A. Background and Purpose of the Public Consultation Process

In 1986, the Government of Alberta enacted legislation that established The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues (AACWI). The Council was to identify issues of concern to women and assist government in ensuring the opportunity for women's full and equal participation in the life of the province. The legislation included a sunset clause that would result in the conclusion of the Council at the end of 1996, unless an extension was enacted. In 1994, the government announced its intention to allow the legislation to lapse and as of December 1996, The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues will cease to exist.

The Council, at the request of the Honourable Gary Mar, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, initiated a public consultation process in the spring of 1995. The purpose of the consultation was to gather ideas from Alberta women regarding what structure(s) and methods would best enable women to influence government and public policy. This report summarizes the results of the Alberta-wide consultation process and makes recommendations for future methods and structures to help ensure women's issues become fully integrated in the decision-making and governance of the province.

Simultaneously, the Council initiated a review of the effectiveness of AACWI's activities during the term of its existence. The results of the review are contained in a separate report entitled *"A Decade of Challenge and Change: A Review of the Activities of the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues."*

B. The Consultation Process

The contract to complete the public consultation was publicly tendered in the fall of 1994. Daina A. Bruners and Associates Consulting Ltd. were selected to organize and implement the public consultation process and provide a summary of results to the Council.

1. Participation in the Consultation

The consultation included:

- facilitation of 34 focus groups with over 300 women from 24 communities across Alberta
- receipt of 15 written submissions from women's groups and individual women across Alberta
- comments from 38 telephone calls received from women across Alberta

2. Focus Groups

A focus group is a carefully planned discussion group designed to obtain ideas and opinions about a specific topic. The group is guided by a facilitator and all participants are encouraged to express their views and build on each other's ideas during the session. This method was specifically chosen by the Council because of its inherent strength in reaching voices different from those that may attend large public consultation venues. Although the focus group method may involve fewer participants, it provides an opportunity for in-depth dialogue.

Appendix I shows the locations of the 34 focus groups. Care was taken to ensure that both rural and urban communities were fully represented. Five cities/towns had more than one focus group in order to accommodate the number of women who expressed an interest in participating.

Participants for the groups were drawn from the community at large via contact with Community Adult Learning Councils, with existing women's organizations (eg. social service organizations, advocacy associations, church groups, YWCA's, business women's associations) and with individual women in each community. Significant effort was made to ensure that the women invited to attend represented a cross-section of women (age, cultures, opinions, influence, affluence, education) in that community. Between 12 and 16 women were invited to attend each group. Actual attendance varied from five to 20 women; on average nine women attended each group.

Appendix II provides a demographic profile of the women who participated in the focus groups.

Each focus group was facilitated by consultants from Daina A. Bruners and Associates or by volunteer members of the community. The consultants provided training sessions to ensure volunteer facilitators and recorders had the skills required to be comfortable and successful in their roles.

The questions addressed by participants in each session are included in **Appendix III**. Focus group participants received an information package in advance of their session. The package included the questions, information on the public consultation process, and a demographic questionnaire and brief survey about their awareness of AACWI's role. The survey is included as **Appendix IV** of this report.

Without exception, the focus groups created lively discussion. Several of the groups were passionate in their dialogue on issues facing women in Alberta. In a few sessions, the deep divisions between some women's groups were very much in evidence.

At many of the focus groups, women indicated that participation in the discussion had been productive, educational and had increased their awareness of issues. They also indicated an increased awareness of the impact issues have on women in their communities and the variety of possible mechanisms for input to government. It is clear the public consultation process itself had a positive impact for many of the women who participated. Finally, some women expressed concern as to whether or not the process and resulting report would have an impact on government.

3. Telephone Interviews and Written Submissions

Women were invited to participate in the public consultation by telephone or through written submissions. An advertisement was placed in the seven major daily newspapers throughout the province to advise women of the opportunity. Additionally, the Council newsletter solicited responses with an article on the front page. As well, posters were distributed broadly. **Appendix V** includes a copy of the advertisement, poster and newsletter article.

II. Summary of Focus Group Discussions, Telephone Interviews and Written Submissions

This section summarizes the information gathered during the consultation process. It includes results of focus group discussions, written submissions and comments made by telephone callers. Throughout the report, the comments used are from the women who participated.

A. Strategies Used to Communicate Issues and Concerns to the Government of Alberta

Women described their approaches to communicating with government; others talked about their inaction.

- 💬 If you don't have passion, you don't get anywhere. *Chestermere*
- 💬 If you're a feminist, it makes a difference - we are deliberately not heard. *Red Deer*
- 💬 Threats. I have tried threats. You know we can vote. *Athabasca*
- 💬 I didn't think I had anything to offer.
Athabasca

Women were asked to describe how, in the past, they had made their views known to the government. The following is a summary of the information provided in the brief survey.

**Most Common Strategies
Used by Focus Group Participants to Communicate with Government**

➤ Signed a Petition	58 %
➤ Joined a women's organization	42 %
➤ Met with their MLA (individually or in groups)	35 %
➤ Wrote to their MLA	34 %
➤ Telephoned their MLA	28 %
➤ Joined a political party	23 %
➤ Wrote a letter to a newspaper	22 %
➤ Participated in a demonstration	18 %
➤ Contacted AACWI	9 %
➤ Other (see below)	17 %

* Note: A number of women had used more than one of these strategies.

The other strategies mentioned by participants included:

- ✓ supporting (time and/or money) politicians who represented their positions on issues
- ✓ participating in task forces, public meetings and round table discussions
- ✓ working with professional associations, unions and community groups to advocate to government
- ✓ networking between/among organizations
- ✓ making public presentations
- ✓ submitting position papers to increase awareness
- ✓ using all forms of media to inform public/government on issues

B. Effectiveness of the Communication Strategies

Women described a wide range of strategies used to communicate with the provincial government. Some of these strategies were successful, some were not. In some cases, women were uncertain of the outcome. Women who had been successful in communicating with government, related their success to the personal contact they had with government representatives.

- Our professional association membership made resolutions ... they brought about change. *Edmonton*
- I was part of a provincial lobby group ...we did a multi-faceted campaign and [women's] shelter funding more than doubled. *Lethbridge*
- Having breakfast with the MLAs is a good mechanism. It increases their knowledge about our issues... *Edmonton*

This area of exploration proved to be the most difficult point during focus group discussions. Many women were unsure if their activities had any impact on government. Some women expressed feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, believing that none of the strategies they had used had yielded positive results. There were very few success stories.

Many women had stories of frustration and discouragement. They described the minimal results of their efforts to effect change through direct communication with the government. They spoke of women as an oppressed group within Alberta and described their ongoing struggle to maintain or regain the energy and strength required to continue to make their opinions known to government. Some spoke of scarcity of all resources (time, energy, money and people to initiate lobbying activities).

- ☞ I guess it's important to keep writing letters but I don't think it influences change. It's a big investment of time for nothing. *Calgary*
- ☞ First, go directly to the politicians. The media is your big stick if that doesn't work. *Grande Prairie*
- ☞ The government had already decided what it was going to do ... our participation was an exercise in futility. *Grande Prairie*
- ☞ The government asked for input on seniors' issues ... we organized meetings of 40-50 people ... made 4 major recommendations but nothing was ever done even though these were reasonable suggestions. *Calgary*

C. Barriers to Effecting Change and Having Impact

Participants provided both concrete and speculative answers with respect to the factors that inhibited communication of their issues and concerns to the provincial government. Women were quite insightful in identifying and analyzing their own limitations. They felt responsibility for several factors that were identified as barriers to change.

The following points summarize the key themes:

1. **The identified lack of awareness about women's issues by some women, by the public and by the government. This included:**
 - satisfaction by some women and men with the status quo
 - a belief by some that many women's groups are demanding and driven by a narrow agenda, including a perception that feminists are inherently "anti-male"
 - concern that when an issue is labeled as a "women's issue" it is diminished or marginalized; some women believe these issues should be regarded as societal or human issues
 - a feeling that no one organization could successfully represent the diversity of individual women's opinions

- the need for more communication and publicity from AACWI regarding issues that impact women, families and the community as a whole
- the need for greater consensus among women and women's groups on major issue areas and what must be done in these areas
- a greater appreciation of the need for diversity of opinion among women and their organizations
- better definition and exploration of both the distinct and common elements of "women's issues" and "human or societal issues"

☞ There's no middle ground between the muffin makers and the radicals ... therefore you drop out of the process.

Medicine Hat

☞ There is **no** voice for the truly disadvantaged, the poor, the native population, immigrant women. *Minburn*

☞ When you belong to a women's organization, you have this empowering voice. *Edmonton*

☞ Feminists don't always listen to anyone but their group. They don't always support all women. *Cardston*

☞ Divisions make us seem to oppress each other. *Lethbridge*

☞ Is there an inter-departmental committee of women? *Medicine Hat*

2. The limited knowledge about *how* to make viewpoints or concerns known to decision-makers and politicians. This included:

- the need for women and men to share information with women about what mechanisms were most likely to be successful or create change
- knowing who to talk to and how to make connections with decision-makers

☐ We have been socialized to wait to be asked to dance - we are still waiting.

Edmonton

☐ We are not comfortable with our own power. *Edmonton*

☐ [It has been] government down instead of citizen up. *Westlock*

☐ Women need to be encouraged and nurtured by other women. *Lloydminster*

☐ You strive for political astuteness but you work with what's there. *Medicine Hat*

3. The limited amount of time available to be involved in activities that could effect change. This included:

- the investment of time required when working toward change on major issues such as health care, education and violence against women and/or children
- significant existing time commitments to families by women; there is limited time available for dealing with issues
- time already spent in community work and volunteerism
- a perception that activities in the past have not had much success, therefore women questioned use of their time on current issues

☞ If my whole world is narrowed down to the next meal - there is no room in my head for issues. *Fort McMurray*

☞ I got political when it affected my children. *Wetaskiwin*

☞ There are lots of priorities, my family is first of all of these. *Fort McMurray*

☞ Assumptions are made about women's time. They can care for elderly parents, ... run the house, the church and the town. When is there time for the larger issues that really matter, too? *Edmonton*

4. The limited financial resources to undertake change-oriented activities.
This included:

- the need for funding to pay for travel (particularly from rural areas) to make presentations and increase public/government awareness on issues
- the need for funding or support for paid child care so women can become more active at the grassroots level
- a perception that current government funding bodies are most willing to support status quo projects
- a perception by some that government funding should not be given to "interest groups" or that government is currently funding the "wrong" groups
- a need to fund organizations to do research, survey opinions and lobby for change

💬 Money talks, so if you're broke, you're silent. *Lloydminster*

💬 Research is being done with men and is then applied to females. We are different. *Innisfail*

💬 A large group of women have very low income so they can't participate. A whole group would have their voice silenced and all they need is bus fare to get to a meeting. *Calgary*

5. The fear of consequences/retribution for speaking out. This included:

- particular concern in smaller and rural communities where women may be "taking a stand against your neighbours"
- personal fear a woman may be labeled as "feminist," "anti-male," "militant," or "radical"
- fear of the impact speaking out may have on spouses/partners, children, family businesses, organizational funding in the future
- a recognition that the fear is influenced by the upbringing of many women to be silent, or "not to talk back."

- ☞ Our lives begin to end when we begin to be silent. *Taber*
- ☞ It boggles my mind that people are afraid to phone a civil servant or an MLA. It is a conflict thing, and women are socialized to be nice. *Red Deer*
- ☞ We lack initiative ... we are not proactive. We assume we are victims with no power. *Innisfail*
- ☞ As women get older, they get more rebellious. I am grateful for my foremothers. *Spruce Grove*

6. The belief that government does not listen, particularly to women, speaking on issues that affect them. This included:

- the perception that government is not willing to foster open debate
- the traditional values of some male MLAs toward women and their roles
- the importance of having more women as elected representatives and as senior civil servants and the current imbalance of men and women in leadership roles
- reluctance of some MLAs to take a stand when dealing with controversial issues
- government puts greater emphasis on financial and business issues than on social, family and women's issues
- political appointments (perceived as reflecting government's "agenda") to major government committees, task forces and councils that should/could be made through local community mechanisms

- 💬 Dissent is legitimate and healthy ... without dissent you don't analyze all sides of the issues and you don't make as good a decision. *Red Deer*
 - 💬 I am not expecting to be excluded, and I expect to have my views listened to. *Calgary*
 - 💬 At the highest political level we need sincere and informed support for various women's issues. *Calgary*
 - 💬 No politician will support putting anyone on a board who will speak against them. *Lacombe*
 - 💬 We need to tell women in business to support women in office. *Spruce Grove*

III. Key Issues of Importance to Women

A. Historical and Present Role of AACWI

A significant number of women voiced their unqualified support for AACWI (the organization) including:

- its research publications
- its past and present efforts to advocate for women and
- its past and present efforts to inform government about women's issues

Of 38 telephone calls received over a four day period, 34 percent made unsolicited comments that were supportive of the continuation of the Council and its work. None of the callers indicated they felt that AACWI should cease to exist. Many callers (52 percent) had suggestions for how AACWI could be more effective or for alternative mechanisms that would ensure that women's issues were kept in the forefront of the minds of decision-makers.

- ☞ Put another VLT in somewhere and keep the Council. *Grande Prairie*

☞ The loss of AACWI will leave women without the voice of research and advocacy and will remove one more means of citizen influence. *Calgary*

Several women and women's organizations identified that the research publications of the Council were very valuable, particularly in recent years. Concerns were expressed regarding what group would or could assume this responsibility after the dissolution of the Council.

In addition, many women in focus groups, written submissions and telephone calls expressed their outrage that the government had chosen to use the sunset clause in AACWI's founding legislation to terminate the Council. Not all women felt AACWI had been successful in impacting government policies relating to women. However, these women also indicated that the demise of AACWI was a step backward for the women of Alberta. Several women also were worried by the current trend of government to amalgamate various councils and commissions into large multi-focus groups. It was believed that women's issues were likely to be minimized or not as actively attended to by a multi-interest commission.

A few women were openly critical of AACWI and its activities. They included members of organizations that perceived AACWI's political philosophy to be "left-of-centre" and therefore not aligned with their beliefs. These groups felt that government should not fund any organizations that represent feminist or liberal belief systems. They did not feel AACWI "spoke for them." As well, representatives of organizations that had specific interests or positions felt AACWI had not done enough. They felt the Council had not taken strong enough stands on some issues and/or did not have the impact on government they expected.

B. Issues that Women Want Addressed

As part of the consultation, women were asked about what issues were most important for the Government of Alberta to address. Many of these issues are well covered by the news media and, therefore, likely are well known to women, to women's organizations, and to most government representatives. These issues are important for two reasons:

- the issues are current, perceived as urgent and are unresolved
- mechanisms, a structure and/or processes are needed for creative and successful solutions to be implemented

Future activities need to be intimately connected to these issues. The issues, in fact, prescribe the work that needs to be done, by women and men, for women over the next decade.

The issues are listed in *approximate* order of the frequency with which they were raised by women during focus groups, telephone calls and written submissions. In the interest of brevity, each issue is not discussed in detail. Key points and concerns are summarized following each major heading. There was certainly not unanimity among women's opinions and positions on the specific aspects of these issues. The diversity of experiences, perceptions, and proposed solutions highlights the importance of ongoing dialogue between women and government in the future.

Issue #1 Health Care

- △ the impact of cuts to health care on the quality and availability of hospital/physician/clinic treatment
- △ increased use of user fees and the potential for limited access to adequate health care by poor women and their families
- △ concern regarding government and community expectations that women will be long-term caregivers at home for spouses, parents and children no longer receiving care by the health care system
- △ concern regarding the skill levels and quality of training available of home care staff and out-of-hospital care providers
- △ need for increased public funding of medical research on women's health issues (particularly breast cancer and reproductive health) and on general health issues that have traditionally used men as research subjects
- △ future availability of abortions given recent discussions regarding de-insuring abortions currently supported by health care funding
- △ prevalence of teen pregnancies and the need for increased preventive focus in schools and communities
- △ concern about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases - increased focus on awareness and prevention
- △ closure of the OB/GYN service at the University of Alberta Hospital

Issue #2 Financial Issues

- △ long standing and continuing wage inequities between women and men for work of equal value
- △ enforcement of maintenance and child support payments to mothers and children
- △ concern for women living in poverty, particularly women with children and senior women
- △ need for increased support for single mothers, especially those wishing to further their education
- △ removal of income taxes currently calculated on child support payments
- △ establishing a tax credit for stay-at-home mothers
- △ need to remove systemic barriers that limit access to loans/grants for women to pursue post-secondary education
- △ need for greater availability of quality, safe, accessible, affordable housing for women and their families
- △ availability of financial support to families who care for disabled members at home
- △ availability of Canada Pension Plan benefits, particularly for women without employer sponsored retirement income

Issue #3 Employment, Employers and the Workplace

- △ job (in)security, layoffs in education, health care and human services, and their differential negative impact on women
- △ forced part-time work due to absence of sufficient full-time positions; inadequacy of employee benefits for most part-time positions
- △ flexibility and duration of maternity leave benefits in some workplaces and with current UIC regulations
- △ devaluing of women's unpaid labour at home and on the farm
- △ impact of cyclical and chronic unemployment among women with limited training, skills or education
- △ sexual harassment and coercive activities in the workplace
- △ privatization of government services to for-profit and not-for-profit organizations
- △ sexual orientation and the absence of protection from discrimination in existing human rights legislation

Issue #4 Education

- △ the impact of government funding cuts on the quality of education at all levels (pre-school to post-secondary)
- △ importance of restoration of full funding of early childhood services (kindergarten) across Alberta
- △ availability of remedial and special education programs for children who live in rural communities
- △ skill retraining and training for non-traditional jobs for women, particularly those displaced as a result of government cuts
- △ concerns regarding the differential impact of increasing college and university tuition fees on younger and low income women
- △ increased availability of career planning and work exploration at all ages, particularly for girls and teens in the school system

Issue #5 Child Care

- △ availability of affordable/subsidized or publicly supported child and day care, especially in rural areas
- △ availability of child care that coincides with shiftwork and weekend working hours
- △ availability of transportation between schools, kindergarten, preschool programs and child care sites for full-time working mothers, single mothers and mothers without personal vehicles
- △ recognition of the value and importance of stay-at-home mothers
- △ employer/corporate sponsored child care for employees

Issue #6 Abuse and Violence Against Women and Children

- △ importance of adequate public funding of women's shelters
- △ concern regarding the prevalence of violence against women in rural areas, the social stigma against reporting the abuse, and the lack of services/supports in many communities
- △ need for increased education, awareness and preventive programs
- △ need to strengthen public and government positions against pornography (women and children)
- △ need for public education, prevention, and intervention programs regarding the causes and impacts of prostitution, especially as it relates to children and teens

Issue #7 Legal Issues

- △ judicial system is not experienced by women at recognizing their needs or priorities
- △ concern regarding court-granted custody of children to abusive fathers
- △ release of violent/sex offenders and repeat offenders into the community and lack of mechanisms to help ensure protection against repeated offenses
- △ inequities in division of assets during divorce
- △ concern regarding juvenile offenders, prevention and community protection
- △ need for protective and progressive anti-stalking legislation

Issue #8 Women as Leaders in Business and Politics

- △ need for an increased voice by women on behalf of women at all political levels including gender balanced representation on provincial committees and task forces
- △ need to use strategies (eg. those published by the Calgary-based "Winning Women") to ensure women make maximum use of their power to participate in and influence decision-making processes
- △ increased support and funding for women entrepreneurs
- △ improved attitude and practices of traditional lending institutions toward women-operated businesses; easier access to business development loans and credit that is not secured by personal assets
- △ concern regarding the tendency of home-based businesses to isolate women and the need to develop support/mentoring networks of women in business
- △ need for mechanisms to encourage the provision of practical and financial support for women to seek political office using, for example, the "Emily's List" concept from the United States that brings donors and a roster of women candidates together

Additional Issues Identified

- △ environmental concerns
- △ importance of the return to traditional family values
- △ lesbian rights
- △ discrimination against senior women, particularly those living alone

IV. Possible Future Roles and Structure

Women had many suggestions for how women and government should or could continue to work together. Common themes identified included the generation and dissemination of knowledge, education, communication and collaboration among individual women, women's groups, government and the public.

A. Functions, Roles, and Activities

Participants were creative and articulate when describing the possible or desirable functions and roles necessary for women and government to engage in a successful *partnership* focused on resolving the issues identified. The functions, roles, and activities included:

- ★ research and publication of balanced and summative information for use by women's groups, government and individuals
- ★ monitoring and responding to proposed and actual legislative changes; identifying the potential and real impact on women and educating government on this impact
- ★ developing proactive proposals for changes to legislation and/or regulations to increase the inclusion of women's perspectives and roles in all aspects of government and Alberta society
- ★ initiating one-to-one contact with women and women's groups in communities across Alberta
- ★ educating individual women and women's groups on the "political" process, both relating to change and to election of women to public office
- ★ organizing and facilitating discussion/study groups on a wide range of issues relating to women in communities across Alberta; the intent is to educate, increase awareness and grassroots interest in working toward resolution of issues
- ★ maintaining a high profile and ensuring a group (of any type) is known by most women in Alberta
- ★ maintaining a clearinghouse of information relating to women and their families and "how to" access these resources and programs
- ★ providing information to women political candidates on issues of concern
- ★ initiating regular contact with the women's caucus of each political party

- ★ at a community level, advocating with/for individual women (especially those living in poverty or abusive situations) to resolve issues
- ★ advocating at systems, organizational and major issue levels with elected government representatives and bureaucrats

B. Future Structure and Process

As indicated earlier, many women made observations about how the existing Council and future mechanisms could be strengthened. Consistent with what we know about the diversity of women in Alberta, their ideas were often divergent. The ideas are summarized here for reference purposes when considering the optional structures described in the following section. It should be noted, the suggestions made assume that *a group or organization will exist in some form*. Some women preferred that AACWI continue while others believed a newly established organization would be more effective. Very few women did not support any type of Alberta-wide women's advocacy organization.

Participants suggested the following ideas regarding *process*:

- there must be acknowledgment and acceptance of the diversity of women's views
- it must be representative of "most women" rather than "a few women"
- it must encourage constructive, facilitated, open debate
- it must be solution-oriented rather than solely problem-focused
- it should focus on a small number of important issues
- it should be independent of government and it should not be directly accountable to a department of government
- funding should not come directly from government but could come from a provincial foundation (eg. Wild Rose) and through business, community and individual support
- it should make active use of all forms of media (eg. community programming, talk shows) to educate and advocate
- it should make active use of technology (eg. a 1-800 number, faxes, e-mail, teleconferencing, Internet) to communicate with women's groups, individual women and government
- it should be participant driven and not administrative or bureaucracy focused
- it should use consultation, collaboration and partnership models to guide its work

Participants suggested the following ideas regarding *structure*:

- it must be grassroots and community-based
- it must be an umbrella organization that speaks with a collective voice
- its membership should represent the diversity of Alberta women (philosophical, age, economic, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, educational, geographic)
- it must be non-partisan and also be *perceived to be* non-partisan
- representatives should be elected at a community or regional level by other women and should not be appointed by government
- it should have direct and regular access to MLAs and caucus
- it must have clear terms of reference and operating objectives
- it must have a powerful name

Optional Structures

Some options for structure have been drawn from the thoughts, ideas and advice of women who participated in the consultation process. Each option has inherent advantages and disadvantages. Each requires, and indeed deserves, further discussion and evaluation by stakeholders and by government in the months to come. It should be noted the options are not mutually exclusive and elements of each could be combined with other options.

☐ **Create a New Council or Commission on Women's Issues**

This option was proposed as a way of moving away from some of the polarized perceptions of AACWI by some women and women's groups. This option would allow for the development of new terms of reference, operating objectives and either maintenance of the existing accountability or development of a new reporting arrangement with government.

This option was regarded by some women as desirable because it ensured direct funding by government, and also represented a fresh start for a new group. Women who discussed variations of this option also believed the new organization should meet some/all of the criteria described in the previous section. In other words, they did not want to see the new group developed as a "younger daughter" of AACWI. Instead they wished to see a representative, widely recognized and strong new entity.

☐ **Create a Provincial Coalition of Existing Women's Organizations**

Many women believed there is already a sufficient number of regional and local women's organizations in Alberta and they did not favour creating a new provincial women's organization. They also commented that current women's groups tend to broadly reflect the cultural, economic and age composition of communities across Alberta. These groups are also politically diverse and advocate differently on many issues and concerns of women. In a very real sense, they also represent the wide range of opinions on issues. It was believed a formal coalition of these organizations could become an effective means of communicating women's concerns to government.

Although this would be a complex option to implement due to the diverse nature of existing groups, it has many strong elements. The primary requirement for implementation of this option would be the need to weave a "collective will" among women's groups to support it. This would likely require several years to develop. The process itself would need to recognize the various strengths, philosophies, and positions of the many women's organizations. Women supporting this option saw its potential for creating new partnerships, finding common ground, and using existing talent and resources rather than requiring significant new resources or funding.

☐ **Extend AACWI's Mandate and Make Changes to its Structure and Processes**

Some women felt AACWI should continue its existing activities and retain its current mandate. Many women felt the role of the Council could be strengthened if some, or all, of the criteria for a new structure (noted in this section) were implemented. For example, some women stated AACWI's current "arm's length" relationship with government is too close and that the Council should be accountable to community or to women as a whole rather than to a specific minister.

Clearly these types of changes would be complex but not impossible to implement. It would require the development of a multi-year transitional plan that would result in the divestiture of the Council by government. Options for funding, mechanisms for appointment/election of representatives, new functions, and accountability and staffing structure would have to be planned for and implemented.

☐ **Create an Alberta Women's Consortium**

Several women described elements of this option during discussion regarding how to make issues known to government. The ideas that formed the essential components of this option included:

- ▲ potential for using the existing Regional Health Authority geographic boundaries to create grassroots investment by women in the consortium
- ▲ creation of local advisory circles in each region
- ▲ nomination and election of one representative and an alternate from each region to the provincial consortium
- ▲ accountability of the provincial consortium to the regional advisory circles
- ▲ accountability of each representative to their local advisory circle
- ▲ requirement that advisory circle membership be representative of the social, economic and cultural fabric of each community
- ▲ local advisory circles would identify issues, facilitate discussion groups, conduct opinion surveys, in coordination with the provincial consortium
- ▲ potential solutions to issues would be generated at a regional level and presented to the consortium by the elected representative

Many women discussed the importance of a balanced approach to issues and solutions. They believed a regionalized process would give MLAs and government, as a whole, access to the wide range of perspectives and approaches. It was also pointed out that MLAs would have a local mechanism for consultation on issues impacting women. In addition, the needs of individual women for support and advocacy with/to government on specific life issues (eg. poverty, abuse, access to further education) could perhaps be provided through the local advisory group.

☐ **Close AACWI as of December 1996 with No Replacement Structure**

This option represents the government's current stated intent. As indicated earlier, a few women supported AACWI's closure. However, many women expressed concerns regarding the implementation of this option. They believed it would weaken the government's ability to create legislation, regulation and policy that were sensitive to women's needs and concerns. For some women, it was AACWI (i.e. this specific Council) they stated should continue. They felt AACWI represented balanced perspectives across the wide spectrum of

women's organizations in Alberta. Other women stated that if AACWI ceased to exist, a replacement structure should be developed to continue to make women's views known to decision-makers in government.

Among the women who supported AACWI's closure, some believed that the Council was too left-wing and did not represent their views (or the views of what they felt to be the majority of women). In general, these women also felt government should not fund any similar organizations in the future and, if an organization is created, it should be required to be self-sustaining through membership fees or fundraising.

V. Conclusion

Throughout the public consultation process, the women of Alberta said they wanted **commitment, collaboration and accountability**.

- **Commitment** to the opportunity for full and equal participation of women in all aspects of the life and governance of the province
- **Collaboration** among women, men, government and the community to work together to address issues of concern to all Albertans, and
- **Accountability** of government for all decisions impacting women and families in Alberta.

The hope, expressed many times and in many different ways throughout the public consultation process, was to move toward women and men, government and community, working together to address issues of concern to all Albertans. To ensure women's concerns are not lost in the process, the move by government toward integration of issues of concern to women, into the whole, must demonstrably address the differential impact of public policy, legislation and programs, and must provide for accountability to the women of Alberta.

VI. Recommendations, Strategies and Activities

The following recommendations are offered as a process to ensure appropriate levels of representation of women. However, we recognize women are not, and cannot be, appropriately represented within the current decision-making processes because of the limited numbers of women in the legislature; on government boards, commissions, agencies; and within the senior bureaucracy. The Advisory Council has serious concerns around this representation of women, and the accountability to women, until this process is fully developed and in place.

Recommendation 1a)

The Government of Alberta develop methods and tools to help analyze how legislation, policies and programs differentially impact women and men.

Rationale: At present, there are no reliable tools or methods to perform gender analysis. Pilot projects are underway with the Government of Canada and within the Province of British Columbia.

"Gender-based analysis identifies how public policies differentially affect women and men. In some cases, gender issues may be significant to the policy, and play a determining role. In other cases they may be less significant to the outcome, and constitute a set of factors to be weighed with others. ... Introducing gender analysis in the developmental stage of a policy is more efficient and potentially less costly in human and social terms for women." (Government of Canada. 1995. Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality)

Recommendation 1a) [continued]

Strategies and Activities:

- review existing gender analysis data and methodologies in use in Canada and internationally
- develop tools and methods that are practical and could be used broadly within government systems in Alberta
- develop priorities as to areas in which gender analysis should first be undertaken; these priorities should be based on the key issue areas identified by women (health care, financial concerns, employment and the workplace)

Recommendation 1b)

The Government of Alberta implement the use of the tools and methods for gender analysis in the formulation of public policy, programs and legislation, and monitor their use and make adjustments as required.

Strategies and Activities:

- integrate the gender analysis process within existing government processes (eg. policy analysts in key departments, Legislative Planning Branch activities)
- broaden the use of the tools and methods to all departments/areas
- the gender analysis tools and methods should evolve over time and community input should be gathered at key stages of this evolution
- "community consultants" should reflect the diversity of Albertans, including cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, political beliefs, economic situations and educational levels, and not less than 50 percent of this group should be women
- the "community consultants," through a monitoring process, ensure the gender analysis is effective in making a difference in the sensitivity and responsiveness of government to the needs of women and men in Alberta

Recommendation 2

The Government of Alberta, in partnership with the women's community, act to improve communication with women by initiating and sponsoring an annual consultative forum.

Rationale: Women need more opportunities to voice opinions to decision-makers and with each other. An annual consultative forum will provide individual women and representatives of women's groups with an opportunity to discuss issues with government that primarily impact women and to present women's perspectives on current issues of concern to all Albertans. The forum will also help ensure there is a review of the progress of government, women's groups and individual women over the past year on issues of concern to women.

Strategies and Activities:

- organization of the annual forum should be initiated by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues
- each year, the priority issues for discussion and the agenda for the forum should be established through consultation with women, women's groups and government departments
- MLAs, Cabinet Ministers and senior government officials should attend and participate in the dialogue at the annual forum
- ensure that the diversity of women and women's groups is reflected in the composition of participants
- provide full sponsorship for women who wish to attend and require financial support to do so

Recommendation 3

Each member of the Legislative Assembly work to strengthen her/his communication and consultation with women and women's groups in her/his home constituency.

Rationale: Communication with MLAs will honour the value women place on grassroots, community-based input into governance and will help ensure ongoing identification of issues concerning local women and their families.

Strategies and Activities:

- ensure regular consultations with groups of women who represent a wide range of opinion and political philosophy
- establish informal focus groups on specific topics that particularly concern women
- each political party report annually on the nature of the collaborative activities with women and women's groups

Recommendation 4a

All political parties proactively support women in seeking and attaining political office.

Recommendation 4b

The Government of Alberta ensure appointments to provincial committees, councils, and task forces, as well as at senior levels within the bureaucracy, reflect a more balanced representation of women.

Rationale: 21.7% of provincial legislators are women; 78.3% are men. 8% of members of Alberta Economic Development Authority are women; 92% are men. 9.5% of executive managers in the public service in Alberta are women; 90.5% are men.

Women should be represented directly in governance. This can only be accomplished by having an increased number of women who are actively involved in decision-making regarding public policy, programs and legislation.

Strategies and Activities:

- encourage increased financial support for women seeking political office
- ensure women candidates are nominated in ridings where they have a reasonable likelihood of being elected
- proactively seek out qualified women candidates for positions on provincial committees, councils and task forces as well as for appointment to senior-level positions within the bureaucracy

Recommendation 5

The Government of Alberta work in collaboration with women and women's groups to ensure timely, independently conducted public policy research addressing issues of concern to women, and to ensure funding for the research is established and maintained.

Rationale: Independent research and discussion papers on public policy, as it affects the status of women and issues of concern to women, is essential in order to support effective and insightful gender analysis and to identify gaps in government policies, programs and legislation.

Strategies and Activities:

- coordinate independent, comprehensive research on issues of importance to women
- ensure community-based (applied) as well as basic research is conducted, through the development of strong partnerships among universities, colleges and women's groups; this could include the development of a research centre
- ensure wide distribution of published information on topics of interest to women's groups, government and individual women
- develop a clearinghouse for the cataloguing, storing and distribution of information and published materials reflecting diverse viewpoints on issues of concern to women

Recommendation 6

The Government of Alberta demonstrate accountability to the women of Alberta for legislation, policies, programs and decisions that impact women; and that this process be integrated into each department's business plan using benchmarks or targets in relevant areas.

Rationale: There is no current commitment by the government to report on the status of women through disaggregated data. Unless this information is regularly tabulated and reported, the government will lack the knowledge necessary for sound decision-making regarding legislation, policies and programs that impact women and their families.

Strategies and Activities:

- all departmental business plans should include the use of gender analysis and should ensure that any differential impact of policies and programs are identified and addressed
- where appropriate, specific benchmarks (targets) for each department should include data disaggregated by gender

Appendix I

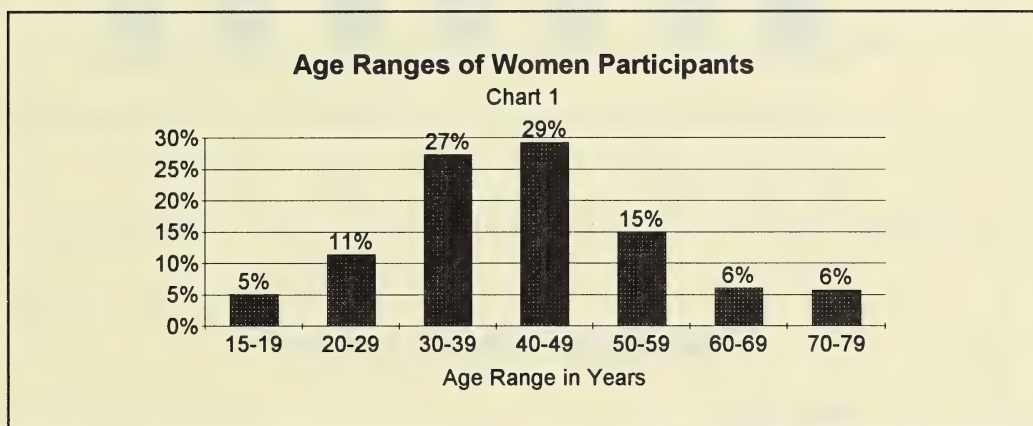
Map Indicating Locations of Focus Groups



Appendix II

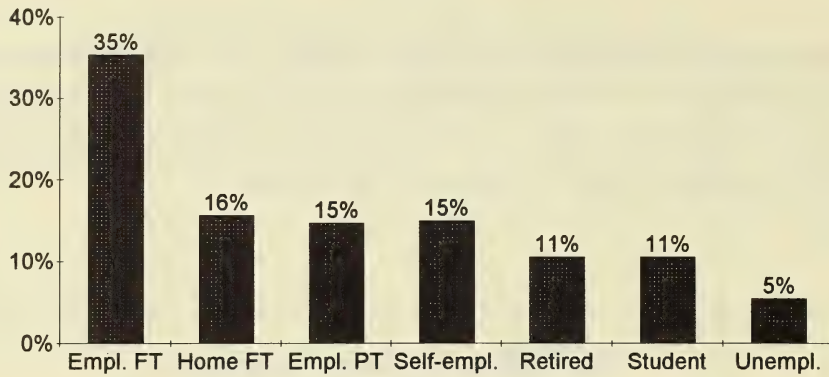
Demographic Profile of Focus Group Participants

The following graphs describe the demographic profile of the women who participated in the focus groups. Not all women completed the survey and not all women answered all questions in the survey. In total, 314 women responded to the survey. It was also possible to respond to more than one choice for some questions, therefore, percentages reported are calculated on the total number of responses to the question.



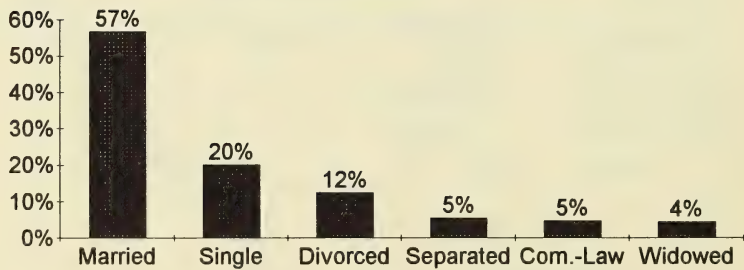
Employment Status of Women Participants

Chart 2



Marital Status of Women Participants

Chart 3



Annual Family Income Reported by Participants

Note that only 281 women chose to respond to the questions regarding annual family income. Of these, the annual family incomes ranged from 19% in the over \$75,000 bracket; 9% in the \$61,000-\$75,000 bracket; 15% in the \$46,000-\$60,000 bracket; 23% in the \$31,000-\$45,000 bracket; 20% in the \$15,000-\$30,000 bracket; to 14% under \$15,000.

Number of Women with Children

Notably, 75 percent of the women who participated in the group discussions were mothers; many also indicated they were grandmothers.

Appendix III

Focus Group Questions

1. What do you think are important issues or concerns affecting Alberta women that your provincial government should be aware of?
2. In the past, how have you, either on your own or with women in your community made your views and concerns known to the provincial government?
3. For those of you who have not taken action to make your concerns known to the provincial government, what reasons did you have for not taking action?
4. What are some of the barriers which may prevent the concerns of Alberta women from being heard by the provincial government and from having action taken on these concerns?
5. What suggestions do you have for overcoming these barriers?
6. What are the structures or methods that would ensure women's concerns are brought to the attention of your provincial government in a strong and representative manner?

Appendix IV

Survey and Questionnaire

Age _____ 15-19 _____ 20-29 _____ 30-39 _____ 40-49
 _____ 50-59 _____ 60-69 _____ 70-79 _____ 80+

Marital Status _____ Single _____ Divorced _____ Common-Law
 _____ Married _____ Separated _____ Widowed

Are you a Parent? _____ Yes _____ No

Employment Status _____ Unemployed _____ Full-time homemaker
 _____ Self-employed _____ Employed part-time
 _____ Student _____ Retired _____ Employed full-time

Annual Family Income _____ Under \$15,000 _____ \$46,000-\$60,000
 _____ \$15,000-\$30,000 _____ \$61,000-\$75,000
 _____ \$31,000-\$45,000 _____ Over \$75,000

Which of the following methods have you used in the past to make your concerns about women's issues known to government? Check all that apply.

_____ Contacted the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues	
_____ Joined a women's organization	_____ Wrote a letter to a newspaper
_____ Wrote your MLA	_____ Phoned your MLA
_____ Talked with your MLA	_____ Joined a political party
_____ Signed a petition	_____ Participated in a demonstration
_____ None of these	_____ Other (please specify)

Before you received this information about the Focus Group, what did you know about the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues? (answer on back)

What did you know about Women's Policy and Programs? (answer on back)

Appendix V

Advertisement, Poster and Newsletter Article

OF IMPORTANCE TO WOMEN

*What are important issues affecting
Alberta women that your provincial
government should be aware of?*

*What are some of the barriers that may prevent
the concerns of Alberta women from being acted
upon by your provincial government?*

*What are the structures or methods that would
ensure women's concerns are brought to the
attention of your provincial government in a
strong and representative manner?*

The Alberta
Advisory
Council on
Women's Issues
wants to hear
from you, the
WOMEN OF
ALBERTA!



ALBERTA
ADVISORY
COUNCIL
ON
WOMEN'S
ISSUES

Write

Send a letter outlining your ideas.

Have your women's organization send a written brief to:

Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues
Public Consultation Process
Suite 1630, 10405 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4R7

The final date for written submissions is April 21, 1995

Telephone

Call the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues
office on March 27, 28, 29, or 30, 1995 between 9:00 am
and 3:00 pm.

If you are calling from the Edmonton area, dial 422-0670

If you live outside the Edmonton calling area, dial
310-0000. This will connect you to a Rite line operator.
Tell him or her that you wish to be connected to
422-0670. Calls placed through the RITE line are free
of charge.

WE WELCOME YOUR IDEAS!

What are important issues affecting Alberta women that your provincial government should be aware of?

=====

What are some of the barriers that may prevent the concerns of Alberta women from being acted upon by your provincial government?

=====

What are the structures or methods that would ensure women's concerns are brought to the attention of your provincial government in a strong and representative manner?

**The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues
Wants to Hear from You, the WOMEN OF ALBERTA!**

Write Send a letter outlining your ideas:



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**ALBERTA
ADVISORY
COUNCIL
ON
WOMEN'S
ISSUES**

WE WELCOME YOUR IDEAS!

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ALBERTA ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

Volume 6 March 1995 Number 1

We've moved!

We have moved since our last newsletter. Our new address is:

**#1630, 10405 Jasper Avenue,
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4R7.**

The phone (422-0668) and fax (422-9111) numbers remain unchanged.

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We Want to Hear From You!



AACWI fills two roles: advising and reporting to the government on issues of concern to women, and assisting the government in providing the opportunity for women's full and equal participation in the life of the province.

The Council has initiated a public consultation process to hear Alberta women's ideas on how to have their provincial government focus and act on women's needs.

We want to know what issues are important to you as a woman in Alberta today and how you want women's concerns and ideas brought to the provincial government.

You can share your ideas in three ways:

1. write a letter with your suggestions to the Council,
2. phone the Council office on March 27, 28, 29 or 30th

between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. (a consultant will be in the office at these times to take your call), or

3. participate in a focus group in your community. Focus groups will be conducted through March and April in many communities across Alberta. These groups will be small and a diversity of women in each community will be invited.

The results of this process will be presented to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues as a full report with recommendations.

This process is an opportunity to let the government know what you believe is most important for women, and how these matters can be heard and acted upon.



Chairperson's Journal

I am just about to complete my first year as Chair of the Advisory Council. I knew going in that the position would be challenging and demanding and I knew I would learn a lot. All this has been true. But it has been so much more...

The Mother of All Women's Issues

The Advisory Council was just in the process of completing a research project on the Economic

Situation of Women Over 55 when I began my work with the Council. It didn't take long before I was caught up in the enthusiasm of this project, which resulted in the release of a research paper. The basic premise of the paper is that economics is the "mother of all women's issues" — women will not have true choices or equality

Continued on page 2

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